

Push the boat out



Cunard's Queens Grill experience brings a touch of old-world glamour to cruising, discovers **Jeannine Williamson**

heads turn collectively as flames rise and the scent of bubbling orange sauce fills the air. I watch this unexpected piece of culinary theatre in Queen Mary 2's Queens Grill restaurant with a mix of admiration and puzzlement – and enjoy an encore performance the following night.

It's instantly recognisable as Crêpes Suzette, yet looking at the menu, there's no mention of this classic dessert. Attentive maître d' Osman unravels the mystery: requesting off-menu items is among the perks of travelling in Queens Grill Suites, and the flambéed French dish is a popular choice. All clients need to do is pre-order by lunchtime and they can enjoy one of the upsides of staying in Cunard's most luxurious accommodation category.

STALWART AT SEA

I'm on a short hop to Rotterdam on board Cunard's 2,691-passenger flagship. Designed for long-distance travel, Queen Mary 2 is the world's only remaining ocean liner offering regular transatlantic crossings.

We might be tackling the North Sea rather than the Atlantic this time, but a mini-cruise is a great way for clients to experience Cunard and its celebrated Grill Suites, which span 172 staterooms across the top-tier Queens Grill and smaller Princess Grill categories. Dating back more than a century, the names come from the exclusive dining room on historic Cunard ship Aquitania, where grilled meat was the best dish on the menu.

While other lines have introduced private ship-within-a-ship complexes to offer premium accommodation to big-spending clients, Cunard is the closest you'll get to the traditional first class of yesteryear. But today's version is not a relic of the past and never feels stuffy or overbearing.

STAR SERVICE

Having the same table for every meal in the dedicated Queens Grill restaurant means the waiters quickly get to know our likes and dislikes, bringing me the standalone vegetarian menu each meal and taking time to chat about how we've spent our day. ➤



CLOCKWISE

FROM LEFT:

Queen Mary 2 at sea; the Queens Grill restaurant, available only to guests in Queens Grill Suites; afternoon tea is a Cunard institution

PICTURES: Cunard



We're also free to dine at other venues, including the grand main dining room and laid-back Kings Court buffet.

In our art deco-inspired Queens Grill Suite, a butler comes and goes with daily canapes, and reconfigures the complimentary minibar with full-sized bottles of our favourite gin and wine. That's on top of the chilled champagne that awaited us on arrival.

A long weekend sailing out of Southampton is the perfect way to introduce seasoned cruisers to the Cunard product, or upsell the Grill Suites to clients that have cruised with the line before. It certainly whetted my appetite for embarking on the classic week-long Southampton to New York (or reverse) crossing.

OUT AND ABOUT

In Rotterdam, there's a surprisingly large choice of excursions, including a day in Amsterdam. We stay closer to home with an exciting Land & Splash tour, where an amphibious vehicle takes to the roads before gliding into the Main River to explore the waterways around Europe's largest seaport.

With an overnight stay in port, there's also time for independent sightseeing. A 30-minute walk from where the ship is docked is another grande dame of the ocean, Holland America Line's one-time flagship *Rotterdam*, which launched in 1958 and is now a floating museum.

CREATURE COMFORTS

Even on this short sailing, there's one sea day to explore the ship. I spend hours enjoying the huge art collection

with its wonderful black-and-white photos of royalty, film stars and politicians who've sailed with Cunard during its 185-year history. The ship is also home to one of the largest libraries at sea.

When I spot the wave-shaped steel structures at the front of the Observation Deck, I think I've stumbled across another art installation. They're sometimes mistaken for windbreaks but a sign reveals they're spare propeller blades, which the crew affectionately call the 'commodore's cufflinks'.

It's another delightful quirk on this distinguished cruise ship, which is also the only one with kennels for cats and dogs. We stroll along the pet-friendly area of deck 12 – which is out of bounds to passengers when the kennels are in use – and chuckle at the lamppost that's there for the convenience of UK pooches and the red fire hydrant for their American counterparts.

If pets aren't partial to the food brands stocked on board, the chefs will prepare chicken, fish and freshly baked biscuits to their liking. Although such special-request meals for four-legged friends arrive without the flames and fanfare, it seems they're almost as pampered as Queens Grill guests. **TW**

BOOK IT

Cunard's four-night round-trip Short Break to Rotterdam on *Queen Mary 2* costs from £1,349 in a Queens Grill Suite, departing from Southampton on November 6. cunard.com

*Ask
THE AGENT*

"The Queens Grill Suites are the pinnacle of ocean luxury. It's more than accommodation, as the experience extends far beyond the grandeur of the suite. Each meal brings a personalised welcome in the exclusive Queens Grill restaurant, where staff remember your preferences and anticipate your needs. This intimate setting offers some of the finest cuisine at sea, paired with exceptional service. Guests also enjoy priority embarkation and access to the private Grills Lounge, ensuring a seamless and distinguished journey from start to finish. For those seeking the ultimate in luxury ocean travel, this experience is unmatched."



Clare Dudley
managing director, Ponders Travel

TIME FOR TEA

Afternoon tea, served by white-gloved waiters to a soundtrack of classical music in the Queens Room – incidentally, the largest ballroom at sea – is a Cunard institution. It's incredibly popular on sea days and as Cunard newbies, we arrived at 3.30pm to find every seat taken. We were shown to a spillover table in the nearby Britannia Restaurant, and although it's a beautiful room, it wasn't quite the full experience. So advise clients to arrive early. Grill guests can also take their tea in the Grills Lounge or, for a casual option, head to the Kings Court.